

Urban Futures Symposium | 21 – 25 August 2023

Candidate: Lucie McMahon

School: School of Media and Communication

Presentation: Confirmation of Candidature

Title: Trade Secret

Abstract:

Trade Secret is a collaborative practice-led research project, that explores the possibilities of representing undocumented queer history within documentary. This idea will be investigated through a documentary film project and behind-the-scenes documentation, made by myself and filmmaker Emmett Aldred, about the illegal hormone trades that took place in St Kilda, Melbourne in the 1980s, between trans and gender-diverse people, who could not legally access hormone replacement therapy. Most participants interviewed for the project will not have been involved in, or even know about the trade. To address this gap in knowledge and history, the project will investigate the role of gossip and speculation as a modality within documentary, that allows 'subjects stricken from, or marginalised by, official histories' to speak, read and compose texts 'against or across structures of power' by foregrounding differences and 'refusing to make the multiple singular' (Brooks & Lorange p.228, 2017). While also investigating the ethical and aesthetic implications of both post-realist and observational approaches to documentary, within a postmodern and post-truth context, as discussed by Godmillow (2022) and Balsom (2017) respectively.

Trade Secret is being made for both mine and Emmett Aldred's Higher Degree by Research programs across two institutions (RMIT University and Victorian College of the Arts), so questions about how to successfully collaborate on creative practice research across multiple academic institutions, and questions relating to collaboration more broadly within documentary practice, such as how to distinguish between the creative work of the director and producer, will be explored. The strategies currently in place to distinguish respective contributions to the process and outcomes of the work are, ongoing negotiations, and written memorandums of understanding, regarding roles, responsibilities and intellectual property.

The questions explored within this research will be resolved through a process of reflection on the creative practice that is informed by theoretical engagement and close reading of key documentary film texts, within a written dissertation that will reflect on and inform the creative process. The creative outputs and written dissertations will be a useful case study for myself and other documentary filmmakers, and practitioners within the field, who are interested in documentary theory and ethics, and queer documentary theory.

